

# HIDATSA GRAMMAR.

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## I. LETTERS.

1. Twenty letters, exclusive of the apostrophe, are used in this work to express in writing the Hidatsa language. Fifteen of the letters are essential, and five non-essential.

### Essential Letters.

2. Of the essential letters, five are vowels, and ten, consonants.

3. The vowels are a, e, i, o and u.

a has three sounds;—a (unmarked) has the sound of English *a* in *father* ;  
ă (short) has the sound of English *a* in *what* ; ą (obscure) has the sound of English short ū in *tun*.

e has three sounds;—e (unmarked) has the sound of English *ai* in *air* ;  
ĕ (short) has the sound of English *e* in *ten* ; ē (long) has the English sound of *e* in *they*.

i has two sounds;—i (unmarked) has the sound of English *i* in *marine* ;  
Y (short) has the sound of English *i* in *tin*.

o has the sound of English *o* in *tone*.

u has the sound of English *u* in *rude*.

4. The apostrophe (') is placed after vowels to denote a peculiar force or aspiration, not initial, in pronouncing them, which slightly modifies the sound.

5. The consonants are c, d, h, ħ, k, m, p, s, š, t and z.

c has the sound of German *ch* in *ich*.

d has the common English sound, before consonants, but before vowels it has a slight sound of English *th* in *this*. d is interchangeable with *n*, *l*, and *r*.

h has the sound of English *h* in *hat*.

ħ represents the guttural surd no longer in use in English, it is like the German *ch* in *machen*, but a somewhat deeper sound.

k has the English sound as in *took*.

m has the ordinary English sound as in *man* ; it is interchangeable with *b* and *w*.

p has the ordinary English sound as in *pan*.

s has the sound of English *s* in *sun*.

ś has the sound of English *sh* in *shun*.

t has, before consonants, the ordinary English sound as in *tin*, but before vowels it has a slight sound of English *th* in *thin*.

z has the sound of English *z* in *azure*.

### Non-essential Letters.

6. The non-essential letters are five of the seven interchangeable consonants of the language; they are b, l, n, r and w; they have all the ordinary English sounds. The language might be written or spoken without them. b, and w, are interchangeable with the essential letter m, and l, n, and r, with the essential letter d.

### Remarks.

7. As no great advantage could be seen in retaining two sets of characters, capitals are here entirely dispensed with in writing the Indian words; when, however, the word "Hidatsa" is used as an English word, the initial letter is a capital. Proper names are easily recognized by the termination ś.

8. The following letters of the English, it will be seen, are not included in this alphabet,—f, g, j, q, v, x and y. The sound of f, g,\* and v, are not in the language. It is a difficult matter for these Indians, or any one else, to pronounce i followed by a vowel (and many other vowel combinations) without an intervening consonantal sound of y; elsewhere in their tongue, this sound is not heard, and a character to represent it would be useless. k is the equivalent of q. English j might be represented by dz, and x by ks, but neither of these combinations have been found in the Hidatsa.

9. Some of the tribe occasionally pronounce the first sound of *a* like English *a* in *hall*, and make other slight variations of the vowel sounds which, however, seem to be only individual peculiarities of speech or modifications unavoidably produced by preceding or succeeding consonants. It is believed that all the standard variations are duly represented.

10. Often before a final ts, and more rarely before a final k or ś, long vowels may be shortened, e changed to ĩ, and a to ă. (§§ 30-33).

11. It was originally thought advisable to include a short ũ in the alphabet or to introduce a new character to represent the sound of English *u* in *tub*; but it is now believed that wherever this sound constantly occurs, it is as a modification of a.

12. o is never shortened as in the English word *not*, but a sound much like short o is heard in the modification of a, which is represented thus ă.

13. The sounds of English *u* in *pure* and *oi* in *oil* are not found in this language; nor is the sound of *ou* in *our* ever used except occasionally in the adopted word ho or hao.

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\* In the words hoki, iphoki, matsihoki and one or two others, I have occasionally heard the k softened into a hard g.

14. The nasal modification of vowels, so common in the Dakota, does not properly belong to the Hidatsa, although a few of the tribe use it with aspirated *a* in the words *a'tsi*, *ida'ti*, *iha'taha*, and *haka'ta*.

15. The sound represented by *c* occurs only after *i*, and in accented syllables which are not terminal.

16. The English sound of *ch* in *chain* is represented by *tš*.

17. In words beginning with *ts*, the *t* is occasionally dropped by women and young people, who thus say *sakits* for *tsakits*, *sitska* for *tsitska*, etc.; but according to the best usage of the language, the plain sibilant is never found alone with a vowel and never begins a syllable.

18. Sometimes *tš* is used where *ts* is to be regarded as the standard, thus *itsuašuka*, *a horse*, may be pronounced *itšuašuka*.

19. In acquiring the language, and making a correct analysis of its words, one of the greatest difficulties to be encountered is the interchangeability of certain consonants.

20. There are two series of interchangeable consonants; a labial series consisting of *m*, *b* and *w*, and a dental, or linguo-dental, series consisting of *d*, *l*, *n* and *r*. The constituent sounds of each series are subject to interchanges so arbitrary and frequent that no definite rules can be given for them. The following remarks, however, will be found to apply.

21. *m* is regarded as the standard letter of the labial series; it is the one most commonly used by those who are considered the best speakers of the language. Before the vowel *i*, *b* is as commonly used as *m* in initial syllables, and *w* more commonly, in median and terminal syllables.

22. *d* is the standard of the dental series. When *r* is substituted for *d*, it is more commonly done by men than by women, while the latter appear to have a greater preference for *l* and *n* than the former. A desire for euphony seems sometimes to determine speakers in their choice.

23. Whenever, in any word, a non-essential letter is heard as often, or nearly as often, as its corresponding essential, the fact is shown in the dictionary in one of three ways: 1st, by putting the modified syllable in brackets and indicating its position in the word by dashes, thus "*hamua* [-*bu*]" and "*hami* [-*wi*]" denote that these words are very often pronounced *habua* and *hawi*; 2d, by placing the entire modified word in brackets; and 3d, by giving the modified word in its alphabetical order, referring to the same word with the standard spelling.

## II. SYLLABLES.

24. The words are divided into syllables in such a manner as to make the etymology as clear as possible. It is designed that each syllable shall represent one complete factor of a word, or, in case of contraction, more than one, but not the fragments of these factors joined together in an arbi-

trary way to simplify the task to the tongue and ear of the English-speaking student.

25. A very large proportion of the syllables end with vowels. The more common cases in which they end with consonants are given below. (§§ 26-33).

26. Initial and median syllables may end with *c* or *k*.

27. Syllables ending in *i* occasionally take *c* after *i* when another syllable is suffixed (§ 15); this most frequently happens when the added syllable begins with *k*, *p*, or *t*; thus we have *micki* from *mi*, and *hañpicti* from *hañpi*.

28. In the prefixes *ak*, *dăk* and *maḵ*, the *k* is seldom transferred to the following syllable.

29. Terminal syllables (and consequently words) may end in *k*, *t*, *ś* and *ts*.

30. A syllable may be closed by *k*; 1st, when verbs ending in *ki*, form the imperative by dropping *i*, as *amaki* is changed to *amak*; 2d, when *ak*, *duk* and *tok* are used as suffixes; 3d, when *ak*, *dăk* or *maḵ* stand alone; and 4th, in the words *duk*, *tok* and *tsaḵak*.

31. A syllable may be closed by *t*, when a verb ending in 'ti' forms its imperative by dropping *i*, as *kipśuti* is changed to *kipśut*.

32. Proper names commonly end with *ś*.

33. A word which closes a sentence, or stands alone forming a sentence by itself, commonly terminates in *ts* if not with *k*, *t* or *ś*. 'ts,' answers the purpose of a vocal period in most cases. (See § 166).

34. Syllables are frequently contracted by the elision of their vowels.

35. A contracted syllable, when not terminal, belongs to the succeeding syllable.

36. A syllable consisting of a single vowel, when following immediately an accented vowel, or standing immediately between two other vowels, may sometimes be omitted.

Matthews, Washington, 1843-1905

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